

**Alistair MacDonald**

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**From:** David Pelly [dpelly@sympatico.ca]  
**Sent:** May 20, 2008 11:00 AM  
**To:** Alistair MacDonald  
**Subject:** Environmental Assessments for Uravan and Bayswater mineral

To: MACKENZIE VALLEY ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REVIEW BOARD

RE: ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS FOR URAVAN MINERALS INC. (EA 0708-002 and -003) and BAYSWATER (EA 0708-004)

I note that you have transferred my previous submissions from the UR-Energy hearings to the present files (above), and I just want to ensure that you are aware of my ongoing concerns. My feelings have not changed. If anything, my sense that the voices of the people of Lutsel K'e need to be heard – and listened to – has deepened. Should the people of Lutsel K'e ask for the opportunity to address the Board directly, in a community hearing, then it is my heartfelt opinion that you must allow that process to occur. To do otherwise is to ignore the people who have the closest possible connection to the land under consideration, the people for whom its future is most important.

Protecting the Thelon watershed means, necessarily, protecting the whole watershed. A piecemeal approach cannot possibly work – that is not protection. An NHL goalie who wore protective pads over only part of his body would soon be out of the game because of injuries sustained to the unprotected parts. It's the same for the land: there is no such thing as partial protection. If the object is to provide the Thelon watershed with protection, then the entire area must be withdrawn from and possibility of development.

Given the vast areas to the east (mostly in Nunavut) that are almost certain to be developed, and the projects already underway in the Slave Province region of NWT, the mineral development opportunities for the future are ample. Setting aside the central corridor of the Thelon watershed will serve the Dene in all the ways they have identified, serve the wildlife which will perish without such protection, and will serve the thousands of Canadians who want to know a small piece of their country's wilderness remains intact.

Thanks you for your consideration.

*Best regards,  
David*

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## Lutsel K'e Speaks Out

Last year witnessed a flurry of activity that focused on the upper reaches of the Thelon valley, east of Great Slave Lake. A mining company proposed development. The people of Lutsel K'e spoke out against it. An environmental review was held. The federal Minister of Indian & Northern Affairs was called upon to make a decision that could well establish a precedent.

It was a clear, cold day in Lutsel K'e last January, when the tiny community near the east end of Great Slave Lake quietly engaged in a process of national, even international, significance. It's unusual for more than a single small airplane to be on the ground at this small Dene village's airstrip, but on January 16, 2007, the tarmac was crowded with five planes at once. The Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board had come to Lutsel K'e for public hearings on UR-Energy's Proposed Uranium Exploration at Screech Lake, NWT.

Lutsel K'e is the closest community to UR-Energy's proposed site, which lies within the traditional territory of these Dene people. In their view, this remains their land. UR-Energy was only the first of several exploration



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companies with interests in the upper Thelon River watershed. In fact, there are many other companies active in the area. So, for the people of Lutsel K'e, the issue was not only UR-Energy's proposal, but the longer-term significance of development.

Screech Lake itself is about five kilometres east of the Thelon River, between the river and the much larger Beaverhill Lake. It is roughly 80 kilometres south of the Thelon Sanctuary, and 200 kilometres east of Great Slave Lake, in the heart of the traditional hunting and trapping area of the Lutsel K'e Dene. The upper Thelon is used by hundreds of thousands of caribou during their annual migrations, by large herds of musk-ox year round, by grizzly bears, wolves, moose and dozens of species of nesting birds in summer.

For many, the region is pristine wilderness of unmatched beauty, with its remarkable esker systems (including the largest esker anywhere in the barrenlands) and crystal clear waters. For others, it is above all an area rich in uranium, a mineral whose value has increased enormously in recent years.

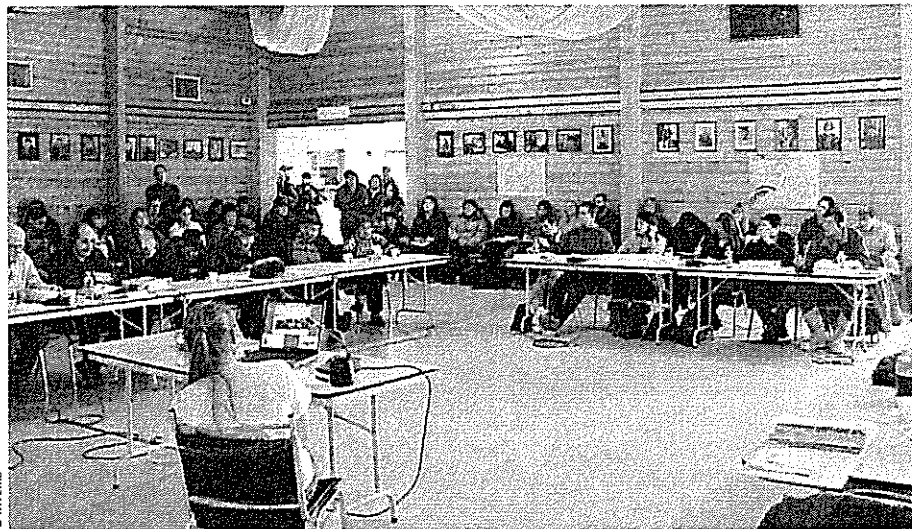
With a large segment of the local population, and more visitors than Lutsel K'e usually sees in an entire year, all assembled in the modern community hall, the hearings began with a prayer. In his preamble to the prayer, Lawrence Catholique, a local Band Councillor, said:

*I just want to let the government officials and the mining companies know that that area in Thelon River is one of the most spectacular places on Earth, in the North West Territories. ...*

*So it's a sacred place for the people here in Lutsel K'e. My grandfather, he told me about that area — he's been there in his younger days — that [is] one of the most beautiful places on Earth over there on Thelon River.*

In those few words, he summed up much of what the Board was to hear from the residents of Lutsel K'e over the next two days. While individual speakers focused on different practical matters, almost everyone mentioned the "spiritual" value of the land.

Eric Craigie, Senior Vice-President of UR-Energy, spoke briefly, and the mining company consultants spoke at length, primarily about



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**Bathurst Herd  
Caribou.**

the mitigation measures intended to protect the migrating caribou. "Caribou will have the right of way," said one, adding that "drilling activities will be suspended if caribou come within 500 metres of the drilling operations... we expect that the residual effects will be local, restricted to the exploration activities, and likely result in only a minor change in caribou behaviour..."

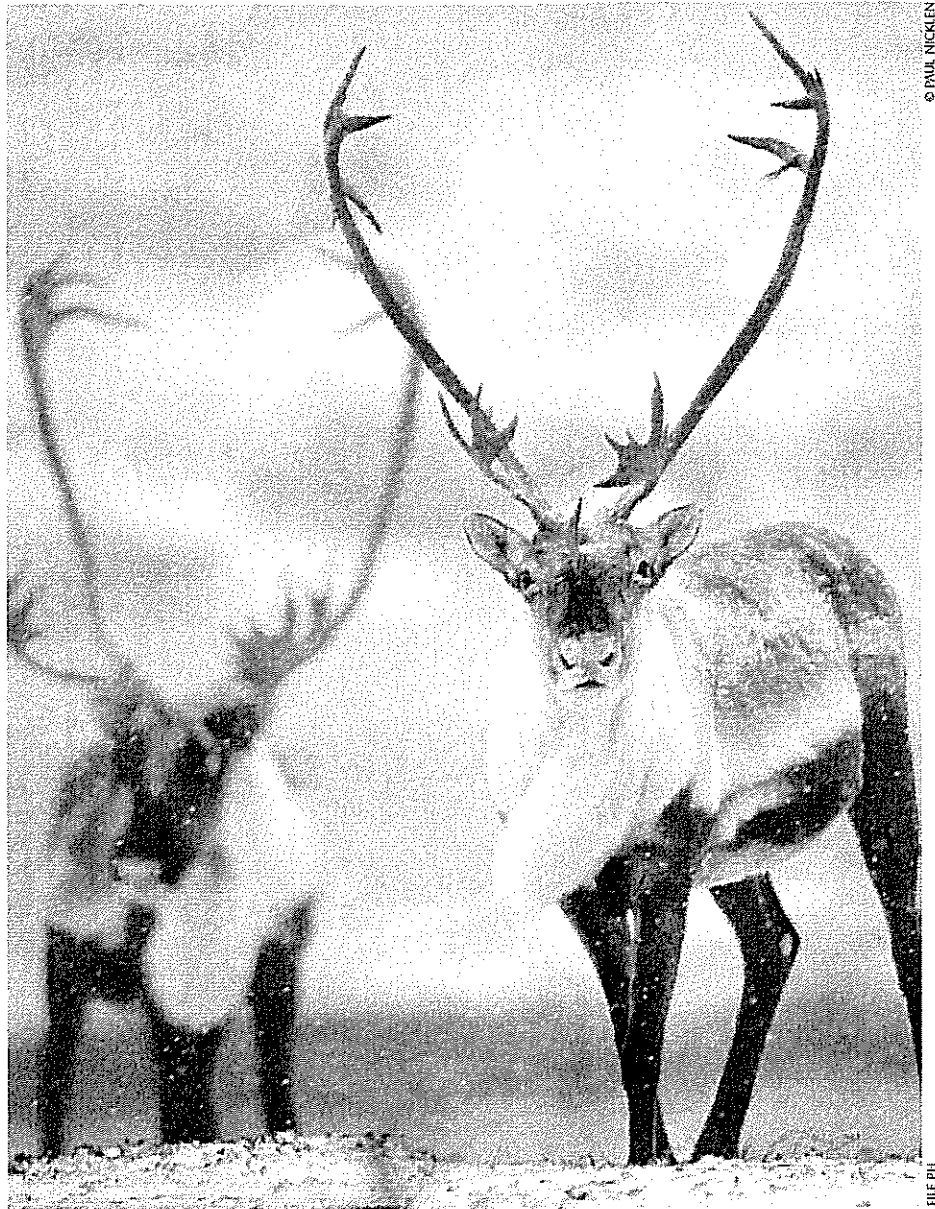
Caribou were a concern for the people of Lutsel K'e. Several people mentioned the caribou in their presentations, pointing out again and again how central caribou is to their lives. None put it better than one of the community's Elders, J.B. Rabesca:

*This caribou is very, very important to us Dene people because we survive on caribou and if our caribou are contaminated or are unhealthy, we're going to be in a pitiful stage[state]. So I think we have to really think about the decision we're going to make.*

*Right now there's a concern that I have for the future of my grandchildren. I wonder what's going to happen in the future if there's no more caribou. ...I think that's what's coming today. What our ancestors used to tell us, they can see the future, and now that's exactly what's happening today. So I thought I would just share this with you.*



Rabesca also expressed concern for his Inuit friends in Baker Lake:

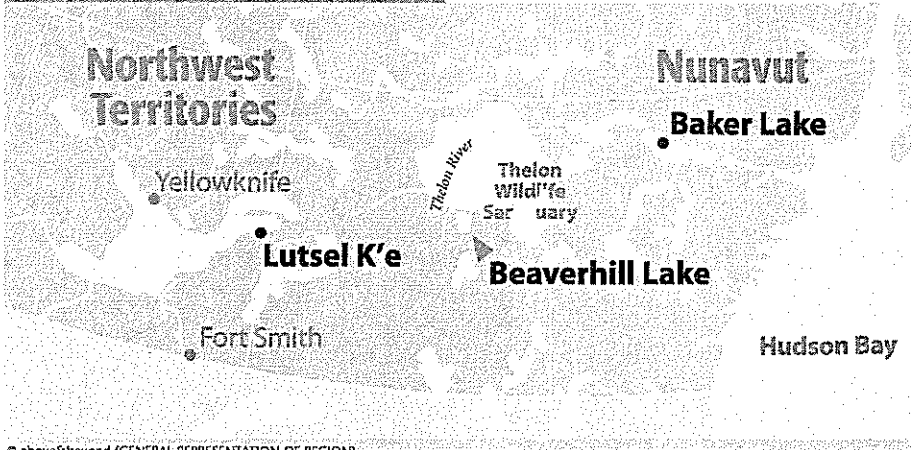
*It's not only us. Also the Inuit people, where are they going to be drinking their*



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water from if the Thelon River is damaged, because that water flows right into their area? So I'm pretty sure the Baker Lake people would say something in regards to this.

There were additional visitors there to address the Board, people from other communities and Bands, eco-tourism outfitters, representatives from the World Wildlife Fund of Canada and the Beverly Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board. The people of Lutsel K'e particularly welcomed the advice of First Nations from Saskatchewan (with whom they have several family connections), where people have watched uranium mining for several years. George Tsannie, Acting Chief of the Hatchet Lake Band, and Chief Throassie of the Athabaska Denesulin, in northern Saskatchewan, both spoke of their home communities' negative experiences, of broken promises and unwelcome impacts.

According to some observers, the most dramatic moments of the hearing came when young people spoke. Michael Lafferty, 13, the youngest member of the community to address the Board, said:

*The caribou lives there. We need the caribou. And if the caribou die, we die too. We live off of it. And if we eat that caribou, we become sick too. We don't want that. And if our children were contaminated, their children will be contaminated too. It will carry on through the generations to come. We don't want that. We want the caribou. We want the land. We want to preserve it.*

*All I want to say is that I want the land to be there. It's my land.*

When one young woman, Gloria Enzoe, spoke in the closing minutes of the hearing, people had lumps in their throats.

*You probably see me today holding my child in my hand. My child's two years old. Will he be able to go hunting for his kids? It makes me cry because this is my kid. It's my child. There's nobody else that's going to help him but us. Us. Our people. Our Dene people and our leaders.*

*I want my kid to be able to have that choice if he wants to say, 'Okay, I'm going to go hunting.' You know? This is my way of life. This is my tradition. This is how my ancestors and people before me lived this way. Our future is changing. Our children's future is changing. If we're not here to help*



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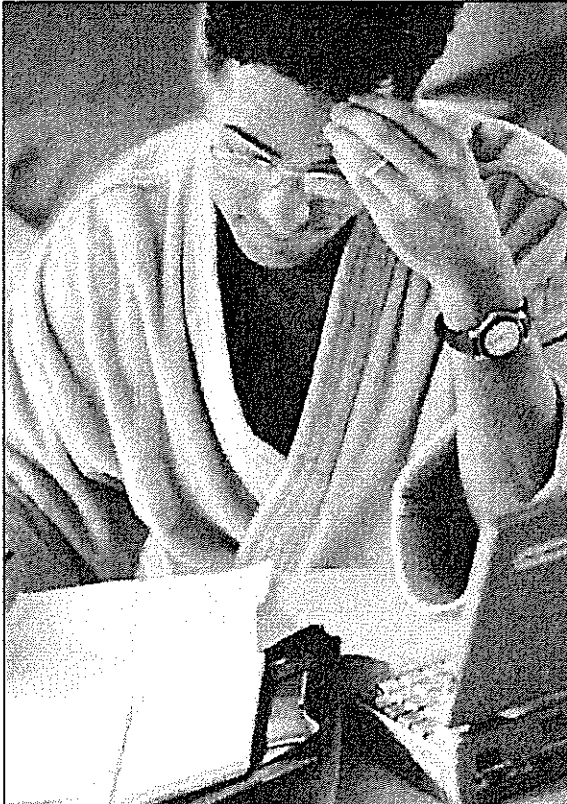


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the people of Lutsel K'e, who have made it clear that they want no exploration whatsoever, for any mineral, on their traditional lands in the Thelon valley. The Board formally presented its finding to the Minister of Indian & Northern Affairs (INAC), who then had to decide whether to accept or overturn the MVEIRB recommendation.

Last October, the Minister, the Honourable Chuck Strahl, announced his decision to accept the MVEIRB's recommendation. He did say, however, that a plan would be developed to create "an approach for addressing the broader long term context for land and resource management in the Thelon watershed." Various spokespersons from the mining industry claimed that "the decision is just a setback for the project," and that "eventually we should be able to properly move on our claims." They pointed out further that "the decision sends an unfortunate message to the mining industry that the Northwest Territories is not a friendly place." Meanwhile, other mining companies have submitted plans for similar developments in the upper Thelon region.

The final outcome may be years away, but one thing is certain: the success achieved by Lutsel K'e to date is already a noteworthy event in the history of resource development in Canada's North. In the long term, there's optimism that INAC's initiative will lead to a multi-stakeholder planning process to determine the proper balance of protection vis-à-vis development in the upper Thelon region, and that this land-use planning will be done *prior* to any industrial activity. The principle that conservation decisions need to be made *before* development proceeds is, apparently, being applied for the first time in the modern-day mineral rush sweeping across the North. 

**David F. Pelly**

*Regular contributor David Pelly ([www.davidpelly.com](http://www.davidpelly.com)) wishes to express his gratitude to the people of Lutsel K'e and to the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board ([www.mveirb.nt.ca](http://www.mveirb.nt.ca)) for their co-operation during production of this article.*